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ABSTRACT

In this discussion on instructional problems in multicultural higher education classrooms, it is argued that while educators recognize that equitable treatment for all students is their responsibility, they often do not know which attitudes, behaviors, expectations and teaching strategies may be misunderstood by ethnic and/or minority students, thereby negatively affecting their teaching effectiveness in multicultural classrooms. Several factors which tend to influence the academic success of minority students, as well as faculty attitudes and behaviors which may communicate uneasiness and differential student learning are analyzed, including: motivation in the multicultural classroom; student/professor interaction; limited English proficiency; cultural variations in oral/written logic; and the understanding of diverse world views. Various strategies for checking understanding in the multicultural classroom are also suggested. It is concluded that universities with interest in and commitment to the academic success of diverse students should: (1) initiate faculty development in pedagogical skills that will provide equal access to learning in the classroom; (2) weave minority students into the essential fabric of the institution; and (3) meaningfully integrate minority scholarship into the curriculum. Included are 38 references. (LPT)

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Common Instructional Problems in Multicultural Classrooms

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INFLUENCING ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM:

COMMON INSTRUCTIONAL PROBLEMS IN MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOMS

ABSTRACT

Ethnic and minority diversity on university campuses continues to increase. As educators, we recognize that equitable treatment for all students is our responsibility, but often we do not know which attitudes, behaviors, expectations and teaching strategies may be misunderstood by ethnic and/or minority students, thus negatively impacting our teaching effectiveness.

This discussion seeks to (1) identify factors which tend to influence the academic success of minority students; (2) identify faculty attitudes and behaviors which may communicate uneasiness and differential expectations; (3) analyze variables associated with minority students learning - motivation, student/professor interaction, limited English proficiency, cultural variations in oral/written logic, understanding diverse world views; (4) suggest strategies for checking understanding in the multicultural classroom; and (5) conclude with observations directed toward facilitating change.

As non-minorities learn more about minority cultures - how they are integrated, their historical and evolutionary development, processes of cultural change, and the nurturing of learning environments, universities can become increasings useful in facilitating change concerning the understanding and direction of intergroup relations within the academic community.

INFLUENCING ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM

Since the arrival of significant numbers of diverse minority students to predominantly Anglo institutions of higher learning, countless educators and private persons have been concerned about the academic performance of these students. As educators, we recognize that equitable treatment for all students is our responsibility, but often we do not know which attitudes, behaviors, expectations and teaching strategies may be misunderstood by ethnic and/or minority students, thus negatively impacting our teaching effectiveness.

This paper seeks to (1) identify factors which tend to influence the academic success of minority students; (2) identify faculty attitudes and behaviors which may communicate uneasiness and differential expectations; (3) analyze variables associated with minority student learning - motivation, student/professor interaction, limited English proficiency, cultural variations in oral/written logic, understanding of diverse world views; (4) suggest strategies for checking understanding in the multicultural classroom; and (5) conclude with observations directed toward facilitating change.

VARIABLES ASSOCIATED WITH MINORITY STUDENT LEARNING

Research conducted during the past fifteen years has been rather consistent in identifying a variety of factors that influence the academic success and retention of minority students (Astin, 1982; Tinto, 1982). Those factors which are most often cited fall into distinct categories: prior educational background and achievement, environmental and familial support, level of student motivation and commitment, higher teacher expectations of student achievement, as well as a pleasant institutional environment (Berube, 1984).

In addition to "common external barriers to learning research has identified ineffective teaching as major factor contributing to the lack of achievement among minority students. Brown (1986) argues that this does not mean that "poor" teaching is being practiced, but rather that classroom teaching is often "ineffective" in impacting certain groups particularly in multicultural classrooms.

Given these socially-rooted phenomena, there are probably few minority students who would be able to success if left completely to their own resources. If not the individual student, then who plays the crucial role in insuring that minority students are academically successful?

FACULTY ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

Sadly, many faculty members are not aware of the attitudes and behaviors they exhibit which are offensive to or ineffective with minority students. With increasing student diversity in the classroom an awareness of our relative inability to be effective communicators becomes heightened. Although there must be ample time for students and professors to test each other out, to estimate reactions, and to familiarize themselves with the communication styles of other peoples (Phillips and Ericksen, 1980:8), no longer can their professor meaningfully interact with peoples of diversity without a willingness to learn as well as teach.

For example, the following is a listing of faculty behaviors reported by minority students (Hall, 1982 adapted) which tend to communicate uneasiness and differential expectations:

1. Avoiding eye contact with minority students while making eye contact with majority students.

2. Ignoring minority students while recognizing majority students. This behavior includes ignoring comments by minorities or not showing any recognition of their contribution.

3. Calling directly on majority students but not minority students.

4. Coaching majority students more than minority students in working toward a fuller answer by probing for additional elaboration or explanation.

5. Interrupting minority students more when they do respond.

6. Waiting longer for and responding more extensively to the comments of majority students. Also using a tone that communicates more interest with majority students and a patronizing or impatient tone with minorities.

7. Offering little guidance and criticism of the work minority students produce.

8. Attributing the success of minority students to luck or factors other than ability.

9. Maintaining physical distance by assuming a posture of attentiveness when majority students speak and habitually choosing a location nearer majority students.

10. Making seemingly helpful comments which imply that minorities are not as competent as majority students.

11. Ignoring the cultural contributions of minorities and using examples in such a way as to reinforce a stereotyped and negative view of minorities.

12. Reacting to comments or questions articulated in a minority language style as if it is inherently of less value.

Minority students tend to verify that these faculty behaviors have adverse effects on their affective and cognitive development. Among other effects, Hall (1982) observed that minority students tend to report the following concerning effects of faculty behaviors:

1. Discourages classroom participation.

2. Discourages students from seeking help outside of class.

3. Leads students to drop or avoid certain classes, to switch majors or subspecialties within majors, and in some cases to leave a given institution.

4. Minimizes the development of collegial relationships with faculty that are important for future professional growth.

5. Undermines confidence.

6. "Dampens" career aspirations.

Continually analyzing the results of classroom behavior is necessary in order to make certain that opportunities lead to successful educational results for the diversity of students enrolling in our classes (Davidson and Davidson, 1989).

It is imperative to undertand educational equity to be strongly related to maximizing opportunities for the educational success of all students in the classroom (Davidson and Davidson, 1989). Technically, because of contractual obligations, expertise, and power, the professor has major responsibility for the outcome of a particular course. However, both professor and student must accept significant responsibility for successful learning experiences as well as play significant roles in creating and maintaining educational equity at the classroom level (Billson, 1986:143).

If minority students are to succeed academically, it is also imperative that the interaction between students and faculty members be positive, encouraging, and, in general, conducive to academic growth. This is a difficult task in a society that has often so isolated and alienated racial groups that faculty members are frequently unaware of behaviors and attitudes that have a strikingly negative impact on their minority students (despite their good intentions.)

The disequilibrium that often exists between lecturing about the significant effects of non-verbal behavior and mentoring bias-free behavior needs to be minimized. Creating a "community of learners" environment is very appropriate.

STUDENT/PROFESSOR INTERACTIONS IN MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOMS

Student/professor interactions have been extensively researched (Brophy and Good, 1979; Cooper, 1977; Good, 1981). From this research two patterns are evident. First, Good (1981) found a causal relationship between professor expectations and student achievement. Professors tend to hold differing expectations for students in their classrooms. Further, professors tend to interact with students in ways that often convey their expectations of student achievement. These expectations have a significant impact on present performance, even if that level of achievement is different from the student's past performance record.

Second, professors tend to demonstrate differential treatment toward students for whom they hold high and low expectations. Research further suggests that professors are less likely to plan and direct instruction at students not expected to make significant academic gains. That is, differing expectations tend to lead to differential treatment in the classroom. Students of whom little is expected are taught less effectively than are students who are expected to achieve (Biehler and Snowman, 1986; Good, 1981; Woolfolk and McCune-Nicolich, 1980.)

Teaching has been described as interaction that induces learning. If the quality of classroom teaching is linked to the quality of interaction, it is important for instructors to be able to understand and manipulate student/teacher interactions in the classroom. Further, because nonverbal communication is often more powerful and significant than verban interaction, professors need to be able to identify and intepret classroom interactions at both levels.

Ironically, professors are often unaware of the attitudes which tend to lead to differing expectations and treatments. The following fictionalized but realistic situations illustrate this lack of awareness.

> An economics professor who has never used an example that refers to minorities, especially Americans of African descent or Hispanics, in this class introduces the topic of unemployment and poverty. He then asks a minority student to provide relevant background information and illustrations to support his assertion. The student, who comes from a well-to-do family, responds that she cannot provide such data. The instructor believes that the student is being insolent and disagreeable. The instructor is obviously unaware of the stereotypes that are at the root of his assumptions and behaviors.
>
> A sociology professor with an average class size of 200 has chosen to utilize computer assisted grading to facilitate testing and evaluation. Enrolled in the class are 23 nontraditional students, predominantly female, who have returned to school after working an average of six years. These students need to express their understanding of the material covered beyond objective-oriented testing but find the professor unresponsive to their request for alternate testing strategies. The professor is perhaps unaware of the very diverse development and culturally socialized learning styles of the students enrolled in his class.
>
> A history professor receives a term paper from a Hispanic student in one of her courses. It is a good paper, but it does have some flaws which, if corrected, would make this an excellent paper. The professor gives the student a "B" and neglects to mention the paper's shortcomings because it is overall a "good" paper in its present form. It is interesting to note that the professor generally believes that stringent criticism results in improved work. She acts on this belief with her majority students, but she apparently believes unconsciously that "good" work is more than sufficient for Hispanic students.

One way that professors relate their expectations to students is through oral and written comments. According to Brown (1986) at all levels of schooling, especially with minority students, teacher interactions tend to reinforce behavior or socialization more than academics. The results, according to Brown (1986), is that minority students think the business of schooling is pleasing the professor, not academics. Subtle changes in professor interaction behaviors can change the focus to learning. Professor comments should emphasize linkages between behavior or socialization and academic achievement. Linkages between format, content and thought, and quality of the effort should be pointed out. Finally, linkages should be made to immediate student benefits.

The following examples contrast professoral interaction that tends to emphasize behavior with feedback that stresses academics as the true business of education:

"Your writing style is improving."	versus	"Your writing style is improving. It is clear to see your idea develop and build throughout the paper because of your varied sentence structure."
"All papers must be in on time."	versus	"All papers must be in on time. Having reacted to the author's ideas will provide you with a good basis of comparison as we read another author's point of view next week."

MOTIVATING STUDENTS IN THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM

Student motivation and student/teacher interactions have already been identified as variables related to minority student learning. These two variables are easily manipulated by subtle changes in teaching style that have been shown to increase learning in multicultural classrooms. Motivation recognizes that all students are capable of learning, but that they learn for different reasons and in different ways. Thus motivation in multicultural classrooms involves issues of learning styles and perceived relevance. With respect to student/teacher interactions in multicultural classrooms, it is essential to recognize that, because interactions affect learning outcomes, these interactions must be thoughtfully determined rather than random.

Just as the way in which individuals learn is as individual as fingerprints, so does motivation vary within multicultural classrooms. What motivates one individual or group may have no observable effect on others.

Educators and psychologists have long recognized that a key to student motivation is creating interest in the course or topic. Creating interest in a multicultural classroom provides a challenge for the instructor because of the varied backgrounds and perceived needs among students.

For example, Anglo students have been shown to be motivated by moderately novel stimuli or approaches to classroom instruction. Instructional strategies as simple as changing the seating arrangement, beginning a lecture with a personal or humorous story, adding color and varied type styles to overhead transparencies, using a role play, discussion, or film instead of lecturing, or adding dramatics create interest among Anglo students. These novel approaches, however, often intimidate or complicate the learning experience for minority students.

Interest is also linked to student perceptions of relevance and purposfulness of the course or topic (Biehler and Snowman, 1986). These perceptions of relevance vary across cultural groups in the multicultural classroom. For white, middle class students in higher education, for example, strong familial support began early in life. These achievement-oriented students are motivated by the realization that a course is a necessary requirement for their degree or that it may help them on qualifying exams for graduate school or professional credentials. For Americans of African descent or Hispanic students, however, this perception of deferred relevance is often not sufficient motivation to achieve. Early in the course, minority students must be shown how the course relates to the real, immediate world in which they live. In order to be perceived as relevant and purposeful, the course must recognize and address the needs of the minority students and must provide frequent application in order to validate the subject matter.

Too often, instructors fail to recognize the immediate and perceived needs of the students in a diverse classroom. There often exists a disparity between the needs perceived by the professor and those perceived and experienced by the students. As a result, instructors are often ineffective in motivating students to achieve.

Learning experiences must have meaning for all of the students in the class. Teaching in a diverse classroom means that the professor must present multiple purposes for the course and topics under study. Even though large classroom enrollments often preclude individualized instruction, a renewed understanding of differing minority student motivation and learning styles necessitates conscious efforts to vary pedagogical strategies. To successfully motivate all the individuals and cultural groups in the class, the course must also be viewed as meeting the specific needs of students, both immediate and deferred.

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Because the key to communication in the classroom is mutual intelligibility, student/professor interactions are complicated when students or professors have limited English proficiency. When students have poor writing or speaking skills, it is difficult to assess their progress in the classroom. The resulting frustration felt by the professor is generally subtly communicated to the students, which further compounds the communication process.

Student with limited oral proficiency often hesitate to participate orally in class, especially if they suspect that their contribution will be judged for language conformity rather than content. The professor's reaction further aggravates the problem, causing the student to withdraw from learning activities and to view the professor and the class as a source of humiliation. According to Brown (1986), when students have thus withdrawn, it is nearly impossible to further involve them in the learning process.

Subtle changes in professor behavior, however, can create a learning environment in the university classroom which is more conducive to the participation of minority students. Perhaps most important, an atmosphere of mutual respect must be fostered in which it is "safe" to respond. Apparently, in a climate of psychological safety students will feel more comfortable about "showing their ignorance" or displaying their knowledge, more willing to share experiences and expertise, and to disagree with the point of view of the professor (Kelley and Thibaut, 1954:778; Schein and Bennis, 1965).

In discussing the concept of psychological safety, Benjamin (1978:7) argues that the class climate affects the student's sense of belonging and whether or not they look forward to class, participate, drop the class, or leave the university altogether. A safe and friendly climate tends to increase participation levels and class attendance.

The following is a list of professoral behaviors which tend to communicate respect for all students during classroom interactions.

1. Pay particular attention to classroom interaction patterns during the first few weeks of class, and make a special effort to draw minorities into discussion during that time.

2. Respond to minority and majority students in similar ways when they make comparable contributions to class discussion by developing those comments, crediting the comments to their author, and coaching both minority and majority students for additional information or further thoughts.

3. Be careful to ask minority and majority students qualitatively similar questions and give minorities and majorities an equal amount of time to respond after asking a question.

4. Make eye contact with minority as well as majority students after the instructor asks a question to invite a response.

5. Assume an attentive posture when responding to questions from minorities or when listening to their comments.

6. Notice patterns of interruption to determine if minority students tend to be interrupted more than majority students either by themselves or by other students. Intervene when communication patterns among students tend to shut out minorities. (Hall, 1982 adapted).

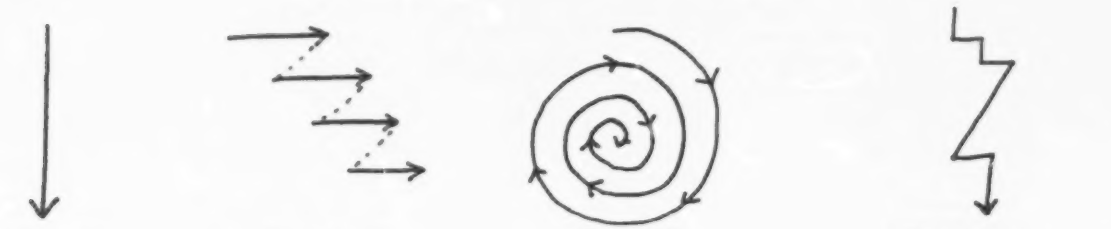
In a classroom environment characterized by effective instruction, much of this respect is communicated nonverbally by the professor. In his investigation of effective schooling with Alaskan Native students, Scollon (1981) found that effective teachers were "tuned in" to nonverbal student rhythms during conversation. The hand, eye, and body movements of the listener were timed to coincide with the movements and speech of the speaker. The author concluded that this unconscious rhythm led to effective communication among Native Alaskans and limited the effectiveness of classroom interaction between students and "outsider" teachers. Scollon (1981) posits that the key for classroom interaction for non-native teachers is a positive attitude toward the students which makes it easier for teachers to tune in to student nonverbal communication behaviors. It is important, then, that professors in any multicultural classroom first examine their own attitudes toward verbal and nonverbal language style and evaluate whether the language style of a minority student's comment, question or response consiciously affects their own perception of its importance or validity.

CULTURALLY VARIANT LOGIC IN STUDENT WRITING

Subtle changes in professoral behavior are also essential in interacting with students who have limited written English proficiency. Considerable frustration results when professors fail to recognize that patterns of organization in speech and writing vary across cultures. Condon and Yousef (1988) report that cultural differences are readily apparent in routine theme papers written by students. These differences are attributable to cultural and personal factors such as persuasive purpose and speaker-audience relationships. The dominant Anglo-American style, for example, approximates the organization of a debate. In this directive style, the presenter's position is stated with confidence, the opponent's position is presented as incorrect, supporting evidence is presented, and a conclusion reaffirms the truth of the presenter's position. The style exhibited by students whose cultural context seeks consensus shows a different organizational pattern with less strength of conviction. To the Anglo professor, this style seems to be cautious, tentative, tolerant or even complimentary of disparate opinions, and incomplete in making a point. Condon and Youself (1988) suggest that this style may be carefully organized so as not to come to a central point or conclusion, as expected by most university professors.

Kaplan (1970) notes marked differences between the "logic" or style of writing and building a position between native English writers and foreign-student writers. He summarizes by way of diagrams:

Figure-1 Differences in Writing Logic



English	Semetic (Arab, Egyptian, Lebonese, etc.)	Oriental (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, etc.)	Romance (Italian, Spanish, French, Portugese)

According to Kaplan (1970), problems in written communication in cross-cultural classrooms emerge at the level of the paragraph. That is, while the individual sentences in a paper may appear to be "good English", minority students who have not mastered the syntax of standard English may still write bad paragraphs or bad papers unless they also master the logic of English. According to Davidson and Davidson (1989), students with limited English proficiency tend to conceptualize paragraphs in terms of length rather than in terms of meaning with inter-related components. The resulting paragraph generally contains a series of run-on sentences, fragments, and disregard for capitalization and punctuation.

It may be necessary to instruct students from certain countries, such as Japan, that the writing process in English involves a different set of assumptions from the ones with which they are accustomed to working.

Beyond understanding the stylistic differences in multicultural classrooms, professors need to affirm these cultural styles. When it is important that the directive English style be used, those standards should be clearly stated. The required style should be modeled and contrasted to the minority group's style, and professors should be sure that students understand the structure of the expected style of writing for the assignment. The use of outlines and drafts before the final paper enable the instructor to coach the student in the expected style throughout the writing process, and thus tend to eliminate much of the frustration related to writing proficiency in multicultural classrooms.

TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF DIVERSE WORLD VIEWS

Another aspect of building a climate of mutual respect in the classroom is personal involvement in the culture and lives of students, especially minority students. It is essential that professors attempt to understand the worldview of minority students. This means going beyond the traditional "culture" components and expressions such as food, art forms, music, dance, and literature to understanding the perspectives and values which minority students hold. It

is vital to understand the minority student's perspective of time, family, competition and orientation toward nature. Scollon (1981) found that teachers who were effective in teaching cross-culturally went beyond attempting to understand the culture of the students by allowing themselves to be known as persons. They gave students an idea from where they were coming, what they like and don't like, their interests, and information about their family, and their own worldview. This process, of course, requires personal interaction outside of the framework of the traditional classroom.

STRATEGIES FOR CHECKING UNDERSTANDING IN THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM

In classroom where students have limited English proficiency, professors must also employ different ways to check for student understanding of the course content, especially if minority students hesitate to participate in class. When successful minority students at one university were asked if they understood the content of their courses, they estimated that their comprehension was limited to 25 percent of the content presented (Bainer, 1988). Following are instructional strategies which tend to facilitate communication of content and checking for understanding in multicultural classrooms.

1. Rather than asking if there are any questions at the end of a class session, check for student understanding throughout the lecture. The professor can gauge if the main points of the lecture were communicated effectively by asking students to submit anonymous feedback cards at the end of the session asking any questions or observations in need of clarifications.

2. Using the Preview Method, students with limited English proficiency are able to preview the main points of the lecture in their primary language. In a classroom with students whose primary language is Spanish, for example, the main points of the lecture would be presented in Spanish as well as English, the body of the lecture in English, and a summary in Spanish as well as English. Alternately, the lesson can be presented in the students' primary language prior to class, and in English during the class session. It is important, of course, for limited English proficiency students to attend both sessions in order to build their communication skills.

3. Strategies of "sheltered instruction" are important in multicultural classrooms. In sheltered instruction, the professor uses a variety of instructional modifications to make the content more comprehensible. For example, the professor speaks more slowly and uses shorter sentences. Key words are restated and defined, and main points are presented in writing as well as verbally to facilitate note taking. Pictures, no matter how sketchy, are helpful in communicating directions. Sheltered instruction, includes using an abundance of visuals and manipulatives. Frequently checking for understanding by asking students to restate main points in their own words or in their primary language involves other limited English proficiency students in a peer checking system. Classes should also be interactive to enable students to practice their communication skills.

It has been suggested that the aspect of the total university environment which, with minimal modification, can maximally impact minority student achievement is faculty instructional strategies and teaching styles. Brown (1986) asserts that subtle adjustments in classroom delivery can produce incredible gains in the academic achievement of minority students. Specifically, although the faculty cannot force students to learn, they can increase the probability that students in multicultural classrooms will learn by manipulating factors in the learning environment.

FACILITATING CHANGE

A primary obstacle to significant change in many educational systems is that educational institutions often reflect a built-in tendency to resist change. To some extent this is a useful quality for schools to tend to conserve values of preference rather than yielding to educational fads. Nevertheless, there are times when reevaluation and adjustment is necessitated.

Changing everyday classroom behavior that expresses devalued and limited views of minorities is a difficult challenge -- especially because much of the differential treatment that may occur in classroom and related interaction is inadvertent, and often below the level of consciousness of both faculty and students. However, although this kind of change is elusive and difficult, it is already underway on our campuses, and directions for future changes need to be charted by ongoing dialog and research.

We need to acknowledge that many faculty on our campus have already recognized the importance of classroom language, and are attempting to identify and to change language that excludes or disparages minorities. Perhaps leaders of faculty development could aid professors who want to become more aware of their own subtle behaviors that may discourage minority college students. Many of the strategies discussed are also useful in identifying behaviors that express attitudes and perceptions based on diversity. Indeed the impact of diversity on interactions in the university and society is becoming a major focus for research on many fronts, both within and outside academe.

The results of culturally relevent education cannot but help contribute to social participation and community solidarity on campus. There needs to be a mechanism for allaying anxieties created by our apparent inability to predict and understand events that do not tend to conform to expectations. In higher education awareness of learning processes often permit understanding behavior of others more sufficiently thus enhancing better interpersonal relations. Particularly important is the recognition that when people of diversity react differently they do not do so from stupidity or maliciousness. Getting to know people of diversity and color is a necessary prelude to understanding and respect, but such knowledge alone does not resolve our differences or insure our liking people whose ways are alien to us (Brown, 1986:v).

A university with interest in and commitment to the academic success of diverse students must assist its majority faculty members in developing pedagogy appropriate to the affective and cognitive needs of all students, as well as an awareness of the ways in which their relationships with minority students could be strengthened. Moreover, there must be a willingness to institutionalize

curricular modifications, academic support services, and, in general, a campus ambience that is conducive to furthering academic excellence. In short, it is the responsibility, both moral and intellectural, of colleges and universities to (1) initiate faculty development in pedagogical skills that will proved equal access to learning in the classroom; (2) weave minority students into the essential fabric of the institution; and (3) meaningfully integrate minority scholarship into the curriculum. A university or college which wishes to be viewed as egalitarian has a responsibility to provide equal access to high quality education for all of its constituents.

As non-minorities learn more about minority cultures - how they are integrated, their historical and evolutionary development, processes of cultural change, and the nurturing of learning environments, universities can become increasingly useful in facilitating change concerning the understanding and direction of intergroup relations within the academic community.

The challenge to educators, then, consists of continually identifying emergent issues to diversity and developing the best possible educational processes to enable the university community to contribute to "setting things right". The intellectual recognizes that all needs cannot be met immediately, but a start can be made...even if on a basis that can be criticized as somewhat inadequate. The real task of the university is to begin to bridge the credibility gap that exists between peoples of diversity and the predominantly Anglo, male-dominated university. The university can do this by attempting to understand the concerns of minority students and begin to deal with them directly.

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